



Review of 'Housey Housey - A Pattern Book of Ideal Homes'

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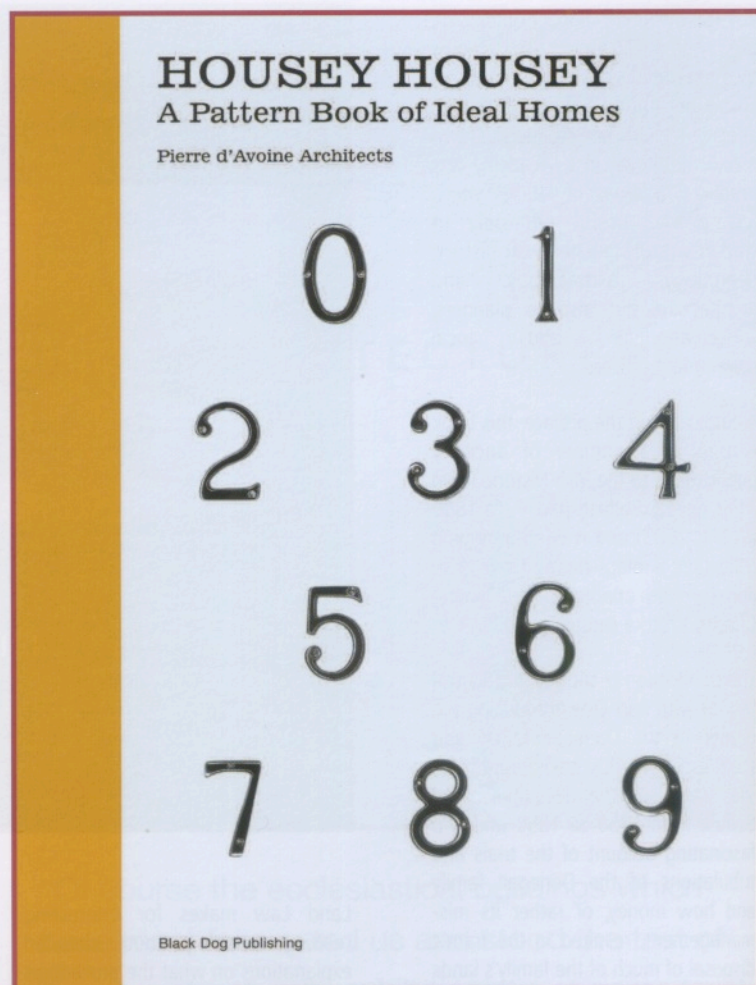
HOUSEY HOUSEY A PATTERN BOOK OF IDEAL HOMES

By: Pierre d'Avoine Architects

Look in any local bookshop in Ireland, and you will find amidst the ever-expanding DIY and 'make-over' sections, a variety of 'house-plan' books. They show the endless permutations of what we have come to call the 'bungalow blitz.' Devoid of architecture, the blurb in these books, talk only in terms of 'traditional appearance', 'sound investment' and 'the perfect home.' In reality they offer nothing more than a bland monoculture of badly designed 'Mac Bungalows.' Few architects have ever tried to engage with the idea of a 'pattern book' that could offer alternative visions for 'home sweet home.'

Written and compiled with Clare Melhuish, Housey Housey by Pierre d'Avoine Architects is a welcome exploration of the notion of a contemporary 'pattern book' of modern houses. Used to promote ideas and reach as wide an audience as possible, 'pattern books' have traditionally presented projects that could be ordered -at an affordable price- or simply inspire new trends with new models.

Housey Housey catalogues Pierre d'Avoine's projects for houses over the last 18 years. Gathered together in this book, in what he has called "23 letters to add to the alphabet of house types", they range from suburban extensions, penthouses, terrace houses, a show house, through to individual rural houses. The book balances illustrated projects with essays on such matters as the politics of house building and the architect's role in society.



Restrictive planning laws and rigid conservation areas, have forced new insertions into the tapestry of suburbia to become either 'Disneyfied' copies of what exists or to adopt a strategic 'stealth' architecture behind existing facades. In the 'interstitial' spaces of the unbuilt, d'Avoine has brilliantly explored new ways to operate. Projects such as 'Invisible House' or 'Sheendale Studios', find space to construct innovative ideas amidst our deeply conservative planning controls.

Behind a typical suburban fence - viewed like a 'Venturi' sign in suburbia- 'Invisible House' is hidden away like a secret garden, cut into the manicured lawns of suburbia. Explored in considerable detail, project 1 and 2 use subtle sectional ideas where the car is stacked above the domestic spaces of the house, which is organised around an open courtyard. In one drawing 'Invisible House' is

shown colonising and spreading across suburbia like creeping ivy, turning under-used gardens into a dense network of occupation.

D'Avoine and Melhuish clearly admire the texture of suburbia "...the greenhouses, the garden sheds, the pergolas, the shrubbery...the lawns..." From their celebration of the 'ordinary', comes 'Slim House' a competition winning entry for a concept house as part of the Ideal Homes Show in London. The project explores the space of the long suburban plot. The façade is an intriguing frame for the DIY enthusiast to create their own individual 'material' wallpaper. Using small courtyards to extend the depth of the house, the project reconfigures the relationship of the suburban house and its garden turning suburbia inside out and avoiding the usual rejection by architects of what is for many people, a deeply popular way of life. ▶



► While admiring the 'Flowering of Suburbia' there is criticism in several of the essays of local authorities, who have abandoned their provision of social housing to the forces of the market economy: political ideologies controlling our ability to construct housing in par with need. The origins of land ownership and in particular 'common land' as an historical measure of civic space is discussed, as is the needs our multicultural and diverse society places on housing design. Loose fit, flexibility, low energy and site 'recycling' are the mantra of d'Avoine's approach.

'Big House' is a crisply designed modern wooden box, with multiple circulation routes, while 'Monad House' plays with vernacular forms and massing. The 'Pudding Mill House' -an almost agricultural/industrial structure- offers very large spaces in an affordable way. The 23 houses all show contrasting and diverse approaches across a wide range of situations and climates. The drawings and images of all the projects are carefully reproduced in this book and laid out for maximum clarity. The key drawings are at a scale of 1:200 which allows useful comparisons.

In the essay 'Reality and Project' d'Avoine relates his discovery -after leaving architecture school- of the hidden richness of modernism with all its multifarious strands and social ideals. It is this that provides the solid bedrock for D'Avoine's design work. Believing fundamentally that

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architecture and design should be an important part of the school curriculum, he believes we can change society's "obsession...with the forms of the past" being perceived as the only way to convey meaning, by opening up new ways to discuss and participate in our built environment.

In 'Gone but only in my head' d'Avoine discusses the architect's awkward role in society, mediating as observer, critic and creator and of the 'mental exile' necessary to survive the professions marginalized role in culture. Not afraid to broaden debate, geo-political ideas, cinematic representation, postcolonial theory and anthropology are some of the references that inform the essays.

This is a refreshing book. No mystical theories; no impenetrably complex drawings; no ambiguous simulations. Instead, it illustrates a passionate belief in the value of architecture to contemporary society. Melhuish's and d'Avoine's blend of intertwining thoughts and projects offer us an inspiring new pattern book of 'letters' to extend our all too short an alphabet of ideal houses. ●

Paul Clarke

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A Pattern Book Of Ideal Homes

By: Pierre d'Avoine Architects

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